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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 004250

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SUBJECT: FORMER PRESIDENT LEE TENG-HUI'S VISIT TO THE
U.S.: BACKGROUND NOTES (C-AL5-01095)

REF: SECSTATE 190431

Classified By: AIT Director Douglas H. Paal, Reason(s):
1.4 (B/D)

¶1. (C) In response to reftel request, AIT is providing the following background notes on the visit of former Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui to the U.S., and events leading up to it.

¶2. (C) The Director met with former President Lee on August 30 to discuss Lee's planned U.S. visit. At that time, Lee told the Director that he was scheduled to arrive in the U.S. on October 1, and expressed surprise that this was only one day after President Chen Shui-bian's planned departure from San Francisco. Lee indicated that he understood the timing of his and Chen's visits could lead to misunderstanding by the PRC and emphasized that the final timing for his trip was not yet formalized. He told the Director that he might change the timing of his trip in order to "escape" such misunderstandings. Lee suggested he had planned his trip intentionally to fall well after Hu Jintao's trip to the United States but without any consideration of the timing of Chen's transit.

¶3. (C) Lee also assured the Director that his remarks in the U.S. would not touch on Taiwan independence but would instead focus on "democracy, freedom, and liberty." He argued that it was a "mistake" to characterize him as the leader of an "independence movement," emphasizing that he was merely interested in Taiwan becoming a "normal country," not in Taiwan independence. Lee stated that he would present no problems for U.S. policy and that he would not talk about U.S. policy during his trip. He explained that he wanted to visit the United States as a representative of the Taiwan people to help "U.S. friends . . . understand the real Taiwan domestic situation." Lee concluded by stressing that he did not want to cause problems and that it was his longstanding goal not to give the United States "too much trouble."

¶4. (C) On September 14, Lee Teng-hui's former Presidential Secretary General Huang Kun-hui (now Vice President of the

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"deep-Green" Taiwan Advocates) called on the AIT Acting Director to convey a further message from former President Lee Teng-hui regarding his planned trip to the U.S. Huang said he had been instructed by Lee to convey Lee's appreciation for the Director's August 30 visit to see him. Lee, Huang continued, fully understood and respected the Director's message delivered at that time, which he, Huang, summarized in two points: (1) U.S. concern about the proximity of Lee's planned early October U.S. visit to President Chen's U.S. transit, and (2) U.S. concern that Lee not talk about independence or cause problems for U.S. policy during his visit. With respect to the second point, Huang conveyed Lee's pledge not to push for independence while visiting the U.S., explaining that Lee, in fact, does not advocate independence but rather that Taiwan should become a "normal country." When questioned about the distinction between independence and a "normal country," Huang responded that "there is a difference." Lee's purpose in going to the U.S., Huang explained, was to visit friends and talk about democratization, not to create problems for the U.S. government.

¶5. (C) With respect to the Director's first point, Huang said that, in order to address U.S. concern about the proximity of Lee's trip to Chen's, Lee had rescheduled his trip to mid-October. Huang emphasized that Lee's trip would be private and personal, with no connection to the Taiwan Government. Noting that it would be difficult for Lee to avoid speaking opportunities during his trip, Lee's message would focus on shared democratic values between the United States and Taiwan. Lee would emphasize the universal values of democracy, freedom, and human rights.

¶6. (C) Huang told the Acting Director that the China visits of opposition Pan-Blue leaders Lien Chan and James Soong following the passage of the anti-secession law had misled the people of Taiwan and the U.S. He noted that U.S.

"policymakers'" comments welcoming dialogue and interaction across the Taiwan Strait had led many Taiwan people to assume the U.S. government supported the opposition leaders' trips. Lee's trip, Huang suggested, would serve to balance the political information and promote regional peace and stability.

¶7. (C) The Acting Director responded that Lee's prior position as President and his active role in Taiwan politics meant that his trip would inevitably have political implications, regardless of whether or not he traveled in his private capacity. Therefore, he cautioned, any remarks by Lee would attract close media attention. The Acting Director reiterated the importance of Lee's visit remaining low-key and not causing problems for U.S. policy. In early September, former Premier Vincent Siew called on Lee, later telling the Director that the former president was outspokenly critical of President Chen's inconsistency and his wife's personal corruption. This adds to indications from Presidential Office personnel of "very bad relations" between the two men.

¶8. (C) Comment. Lee Teng-hui's U.S. visit was organized by his personal staff with some assistance from Taiwan Advocates, a Lee think tank. AIT found the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU), of which Lee is usually termed the "spiritual leader," to be totally out of the loop on Lee's trip. (In fact, TSU officials indicated they have little contact at all with former President Lee and his staff.) Lee's associates and staffers were extremely skittish and close-hold about the trip, necessitating the Director's personal intervention with Lee himself. Presidential Secretary General James Huang and other government officials repeatedly emphasized to AIT that Lee's visit was purely private and had nothing to do with the Taiwan government. They also indicated that President Chen was none too happy about the Lee visit. They did, nonetheless, request AIT and USG facilitation of Lee's travel in the U.S. End Comment.

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